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ABSTRACT

From its inception in 1914 until 1940, the New Mexico Agricultural Extension Service was quite successful in delivering educational programs to non-English speaking, Hispanic women in Santa Fe County and almost totally unsuccessful in Dona Ana County. Criteria for success were involvement of ethnic women in the program, ability to adapt national and state programs to local economic and social conditions and needs of these constituents, the amount and quality of transfer of technology occurring, and the number of rural people able to remain on the land. Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, Santa Fe County extension agent from 1929-1940, was primarily responsible for the agency's success in northern New Mexico. She reached 80% of farm families by organizing 13 adult clubs and children's food, clothing, and gardening clubs; providing weekly newspaper columns in Spanish; helping Hispanic women obtain canning equipment and sewing machines; encouraging women to take an interest in the interiors of their homes; and promoting sale of traditional handicrafts. Service in southern Dona Ana County was hampered by lack of Hispanic, bilingual agents; frequent agent turnover; lack of funds; affiliation with the Anglo-oriented Farm Bureau; and strict gender segregation of children's clubs. (NEC)

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CROSSING ETHNIC BARRIERS IN THE SOUTHWEST: WOMEN'S AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION EDUCATION, 1914-1940

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The educational programs of the Agricultural Extension Service were, inevitably, reflective of the public policies and practices of the various agencies involved in delivering those programs. Created in 1914 as part of the progressive reform movement in the United States, the Agricultural Extension Service (AES) was involved in both the idealism of that movement and the realities of American life that committed it in most areas to rigid gender and ethnic segregation. Because AES was both national and local, it became the crossroads where public policies of various levels of government met, clashed, and changed. At the national level, officials attempted to maintain systematic policies; at the local level agents attempted to adapt them to local conditions. The success of these programs must, in the last analysis, be judged by how they worked at the local level, educating the poorest, female ethnic women. Educating ethnic women and girls in rural communities in New Mexico, the focus of this paper, can thus be seen as more than just an isolated example of how public policy was implemented. How well agents crossed the ethnic barriers in the Southwest as well as other areas of the country is one key to judging how well agricultural policy functioned in the United States.

This paper looks at the way in which the New Mexico AES

(NMAES) dealt with the question of ethnicity in its educational programs for women during its first twenty-six years, from 1914 to 1940. I use the counties of Doña Ana in southern New Mexico and Santa Fe in northern New Mexico to test the success of AES in delivering educational programs to non-English speaking, Hispanic communities. My criteria for success are: involvement of ethnic women in the program, ability to adapt national and state programs to local economic and social conditions and needs of these constituents, the amount and quality of transfer of technology occurring, and number of rural people able to remain on the land. Measured by these criteria, despite the ethnic and gender discrimination inherent in the program, agents were quite successful in Santa Fe in delivering an educational program to Hispanic constituents. In Doña Ana agents were almost totally unsuccessful.

All New Mexico counties shared certain geographical and demographic characteristics that made educational programs difficult to implement. The region in 1914, indeed to a great extent today, is large, sparcely populated, and divided by mountains and deserts that are practically impassable during parts of the summer and winter. While much of the farming population was, and is, concentrated in the valley of the Rio Grande, a fertile swath that cuts through the center of the state from north to south, other rural communities are scattered along the Pecos and Gila Rivers as well as numerous smaller rivers, in mountain valleys, and on the eastern plains. In 1910, a few years before the AES began, over eighty percent of

New Mexico women were living in these rural areas, on farms or ranches. In 1940, almost seventy percent still lived there.[1]

Economically, most rural women in New Mexico were poor. Some were so poor they could not afford the few cents necessary to buy commercial patterns or material necessary for clothing projects. In 1940, almost half of the state's eighty-four thousand farm women lived on farms under fifty acres and over three-fifths on farms under 175 acres worth just over four thousand dollars each. Over one-third lived on subsistence farms producing primarily for use and almost three-forths lived on farms that produced less than one thousand dollars worth of products to use or sell.[2]

In 1914, at least sixty percent of all rural women were Hispanic. Most read and spoke only Spanish. By 1940, the number of rural women who spoke and read English was greatly increased but most women still were not completely comfortable using English literary sources. Moreover, Hispanic women had their own separate cultural traditions. Their strongest ties were to kin and village community. Mother-daughter and neighbor ties were particularly strong. Public activities usually revolved around religious holidays and there were few non-religious community-based public activities. Women did not often accompany men on trips to town, nor did they migrate to work there. Women took care of the small subsistence farms while men and children, usually boys, worked off farm to bring in a cash income. There was, however, a tradition of village cooperation, frequently kin-based, with labor exchange among women common.[3]

The Hispanic culture was well-adapted to deal with changing conditions. Communities had successfully adapted to major economic and political changes since their arrival as colonists in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, primarily through family-based change. There was also a tradition of distrust of outsiders, developed over several centuries. Some outsiders thought they understood the problems of rural people and wanted to help; others wanted to exploit. Sometimes the difference between the two types seemed slim as rural people attempted to develop survival strategies what would allow their families to remain on the land.

Staff officials recognized the need to recruit bilingual agents early in the new program. Few Americans knew Spanish, however, and administrators had no strategy for training Spanish speaking agents except through the regular college agricultural and home economics programs. Few rural people had the necessary education to complete these programs nor the economic and social support necessary to do so. The early home demonstration staff was small, underpaid, and undervalued. Men assumed that agricultural agents could organize home demonstration activities but that home demonstration agents could not organize agricultural activities; that if only one agent could be funded, that one should be a male agricultural agent. On this premise, both the AES administrators at the land grant college and the county officials agreed. If the population was mixed, the agent was almost always Anglo. Only in overwhelmingly Spanish-speaking counties, where county commissioners stipulated that a

Hispanic agent be supplied in their funding agreements, were agents Spanish-speaking. Before 1929, except for World War I, home demonstration agents served in only two to four of the state's thirty-one counties. From 1929 to 1937, only eight to sixteen home demonstration agents served and not until 1938-1940 were there seventeen to twenty agents in the state. Of these, only one Hispanic agent, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, was employed for any length of time, from 1929 to 1940.[4].

World War I provided a small exception of this poor record of support for home demonstration agents before 1929. The state voted emergency funds during the war and these, together with expanded federal funds, allowed the AES to hire extra home demonstration agents. During 1917, Gertrude Espinosa was hired with emergency funds and in February, 1918, a Spanish-speaking Anglo agent was added. Espinoza began to translate bulletins on cooking, sewing, and poultry raising into Spanish. She spoke to parents before organizing children, something she knew was absolutely necessary. During 1918, these two agents gave 162 demonstrations in Spanish in seven counties and visited over three hundred homes of Hispanic women. Informal canning demonstrations went on in the homes of women where, as one agent wrote: "the native women come with black shawls over their heads, roll their cigarettes and smoke as they stand about the table where the demonstrator is working." The first statewide Mother-Daughter Congress, held during the war, featured demonstrations in Spanish as well as English. Only a miniscule part of the Hispanic majority was reached, however, and after the war funds for Spanish educational programs for women were

dropped. The few male Hispanic agents retained after the war provided some guidance, primarily for girls and boys in clubs. The female Hispanic majority was largely unreached during the 1920s even in the few counties that did retain a demonstration agent.[5]

The assumption that agricultural agents were more important than home demonstration agents, and that no one person could be trained to perform both tasks led to instability that greatly weakened the home demonstration program. Sarah Van Vleck, the only Spanish-speaking agent, took over Doña Ana county in 1918 at the end of the war. She stayed for seven years but after her term, neither a permanent nor a Spanish-speaking agent replaced her. The next agent stayed for only two years. Her successor stayed for over four years but when she left in June 1932, she was not replaced until June 1937. During these five years, no work was done with women. Girls were enrolled in cooking or clothing clubs but little attention given to their work. It took the new agent over a year to reorganize the women, and then in two years, she left. Thus, the program suffered from the lack of an ongoing program for English-speaking women as well as for the Spanish speaking majority.[6]

With the exception of Van Vleck, none of the agents spoke Spanish or gave much time to organizing the Spanish-speaking majority. A few girls had been organized into clubs since World War I. At least one woman in San Miguel, Señora Rodriguez, described by the agent as the "most cultured and influential lady in the town," became a club leader. In Old Mesilla, an

Anglo teacher organized Hispanic girls there into an award winning club that canned, did needlework, and gave concerts. When it came to organizing women during the 1920s, however, the agents chose to work primarily through the local Farm Bureau rather than directly with farm families, and the Farm Bureau was organized primarily of Anglo agricultural developers. As Van Vleck explained in 1924, "While natives and Mexicans make up about 50% of the population, the American people take the lead in all agricultural affairs, and determine the policies to be pursued."[7]

Doña Ana county had a Hispanic majority but not as large a majority as in the northern counties. Hispanics had lost political control in Doña Ana by the late nineteenth century and they had lost much of their land as well. The census of 1910 showed that two-thirds of the farm families were still Spanish surnamed, however, almost one-half of them born in New Mexico, another one quarter naturalized citizens who had immigrated from Mexico, and one quarter Mexican aliens who frequently rented land and worked as farm laborers. Most of the Anglo minority were citizens but almost all had migrated to the county from other parts of the United States. This Anglo rural minority had successfully engineered the development of Elephant Butte Dam in the early twentieth century. When it was completed in 1915, it resulted in high water assessments that many poor Hispanic farm families could not pay. They also successfully pushed for other public projects in the county that raised the tax base on land. The state land grant college and thus the state AES was located in Doña Ana county, but the college, the AES, and the Farm Bureau

were dominated by Anglos. All three groups considered Anglo male farmers with their agricultural development projects as their primary constituents.[8]

The decision to work through the Farm Bureau simplified the work of the overworked, underpaid, HDAs. It also meant, however, that they would spend most of their time working with the Anglo women already organized in the Farm Bureau, most of whom assumed their roles to be narrowly domestic. No complete records of the county Farm Bureau exist for the period after 1917, when it was formed. A liberal and quite progressive Jewish New Mexican businessman headed the Farm Bureau during these years. He lobbied successfully for federal projects favorable to western farmers, including irrigation. However, no Spanish surnames appear on county lists of male or female officers. Only once do the records of the agent note meeting at the home of a Hispanic woman for a demonstration. One meeting was held with blacks in Vado in 1927, and a food preservation meeting for "colored girls" took place in 1937, but except for these references, one would not know that the rural majority was Hispanic or that there was at Vado, a vigorous commuinity of black farmers who would later organize a branch of the Southern Farm Tenants Union. There seemed to be a total lack of understanding of Hispanic women and what was needed to engage them in the programs. As the agent reported in 1927: "There are a great many Mexicans in the valley but little work has been done with them, tho they are always invited to the meetings."[9]

One agent did initiate an outreach program in the northern

part of the county in 1922. With the help of the state Director of Child Welfare, Dr. Janet Reid, Van Vleck began a study of nutrition of Hispanic children. A state nurse spent six months surveying health conditions with Van Vleck and they found an appallingly high infant mortality rate--an estimated fifty percent in the village of Salem--and widespread malnutrition. Few families had cows and adults fed children what they ate--tortillas, beans, and chili. The two women took action at once. A dairy donated goats which they loaned to the mothers of the most malnourished children. With the aid of the Red Cross, the women obtained milk supplements for the schools. They organized clubs to can food and cook school lunches. They also succeeded in getting the county to hire a full time health physician and a nurse. The nurse then took over the health work in rural areas.[10]

These projects, however, were undertaken for the poorest rural population, those who lived in jacals (chinked wood huts) in the bosque (brush around the river), and who were really below subsistence. As for those Hispanic farm women who were struggling to continue subsistence farming, or to improve their farms, there was no explicit mention of attempting to reach them. The strict gender segregation of clubs may have contributed to this lack of contact. Poorer families needed to have projects that contributed to the income of the family. Most Anglo farmers, as the HDAs repeatedly noted, were well educated and fairly prosperous. While the prosperity of Anglo farmers was probably exagerated by agents, the comments did reflect the fact that those women and children who were

organized into clubs, had different interests from poorer Hispanic farm women and daughters. Anglo daughters could afford material for sewing and cooking projects; many Hispanic daughters could not. The agent did not encourage mixed vegetable or poultry clubs, thus girls tended to be organized only in cooking and sewing clubs. When the new agent arrived in 1940, she noted that at Mesquite "the Anglo and Spanish-American girls were separated because they did not work well together." When this new agent tried to visit the Hispanic Club, she drove all over Mesquite before finally giving up. "We have hopes of locating the girls and their leader early and really doing some work with them next year," she reported. The old agent had managed to work with one group of Hispanic women on sewing for three months but when few women showed up during the summer the new agent disbanded the group. The new agent apparently did not understand why these women might not be attending during the summer and abandoned further attempts at education.[11]

Late in the 1930s, the agent reported that the Hispanic boys could not afford livestock projects and thus were being organized into handcraft groups. Nowhere was there discussion of organizing girls into vegetable or poultry groups, or of helping to provide livestock to children who might develop projects. Goats were loaned to starving families but little was done to help other families improve their situation. The gender segregation both reflected and increased the ethnic segregation already institutionalized in the county AES program.[12]

As a result of the indifference of the agents and their

lack of understanding, there was little help in countering the drastic economic influences of agricultural development on Hispanic farm families. Most families turned to farm labor and housework to survive. When the New Deal came into the county, agents worked with federal representatives but they opposed programs that might have helped the poorer farmers. The Farm Bureau blocked an attempt to establish a migrant camp in Doña Ana because farm owners feared it might become a center for farm worker organizing. The agricultural agent also opposed resettling poor share cropper families on land of their own under the rehabilitation program of 1935. He believed that people were rehabilitated if they were placed back in their former status of farm laborers or share croppers. "It is doubtful," he wrote, "if it is possibile to rehabilitate most of these clients beyond the point where they were at the time of the beginning of the depression." In fact, most New Deal programs in the Mesilla Valley benefited middling families or wealthy farmers.[1]

The situation in Santa Fe county was a direct contrast to that in Doña Ana county. Stability was the most important factor. There was no HDA in the 1920s but from the time that Fabiola Cabeza de Baca was appointed in 1929, the program grew steadily under her guidance. From 1929 to 1932, De Baca served both Santa Fe and Rio Arriba counties; from 1932 through 1940 she worked in Santa Fe county alone. Except for a period of hospitalization and recovery from an automobile accident, between December 1932 and September 1934, and relatively short vacations, De Baca devoted her full energy and time to serving

the Hispanic, Anglo, and Indian women of the county. The women's support for her was so firm that even during her illness, the women continued their organizations. When De Baca returned, she was able to rebuild momentum swiftly. This decade of stability was a very important factor in building rapport and trust within the Hispanic community. The agricultural agents also remained the same in both counties for the entire period, both welcomed her work, and found that her organizing of women assisted them in organizing the men. As the agent in Rio Arriba reported, his organizing among the men was much easier after De Baca arrived: "She has helped materially in establishing much better cooperation among farm homes, with the results that men farmers have reacted more readily to better farming practices."[14]

Thus much of the credit for success among both men and women belongs to this unique woman who pioneered agricultural extension among Hispanic farm families. De Baca had grown up on her grandparents ranch near Las Vegas, New Mexico, after her mother died when she was five. She studied with the Sisters of Loretto, then taught in a rural school before receiving her degree in Home Economics from the agricultural college at Las Cruces. Her clearly written reports provide an extraordinary record of how AES educational programs were implemented at the local level.[15]

In some ways, the lack of organization by a Farm Bureau or similar organization was an advantage to De Baca. It enabled her to organize new groups in communities of Anglos and Indians,

as well as Hispanics. By 1938, she had helped organize thirteen adult clubs, and estimated that she was reaching eighty percent of the farm families. De Baca also organized women to act as volunteers for childrens clubs, both Anglo and Hispanic, teachers and farm women. She did not encourage strict gender segregation in children's clubs. By 1937, for example, she had organized some 373 children, 112 boys and 261 girls. Of the girls, a majority, 191 were in traditional food and clothing clubs but an additional 70 were in agricultural clubs with the 112 boys. Many girls were in home gardening and poultry clubs. De Baca began by encouraging women to undertake gardens and can or sell surplus, to learn nutrition as an adjunct to preparing this surplus, to exchange field labor with neighbors to obtain the foods they needed for their food preservation projects, to engage in poultry raising, to learn handicrafts to sell as well as to improve their homes, to sew better constructed garments, and to undertake home repairs. For those she could not reach directly, with group demonstrations or individual home visits, she provided a "Ciencia Domestica" column in the weekly newspaper El Nuevo Mexicano and bulletins in Spanish.[16]

De Baca also encouraged tranfer of technology among poor Hispanic women. During the early 1930s, she helped them obtain--both cooperatively and through family saving projects--canning equipment such as pressure cookers, tin can sealers, jars, and second stoves that could be placed outdoors where it was cooler. Later, she helped them obtain sewing machines, purchased patterns for collective use (fifty to sixty women used each of the patterns collected in her office), taught them how

to repair their sewing machines, and how to modify the commercial patterns. She encouraged the women to barter labor for material and sewing supplies, shop for inexpensive yardage, and encouraged their efforts to improve the appearance of their children and themselves. By the late 1930s, ninety-five percent of the women had home gardens and ninety percent had sewing machines. The children were well nourished and well dressed.[17]

By this time, women were also redirecting savings into the appearance of their homes. De Baca reported in 1938, "Nearly every woman in club work has carried on some repair work in her home." New Deal projects were bringing in cash to the families through husbands and children and women were saving this cash income to purchase needed building materials. The pattern had been established long before, however, for even in hard times of the drought, she had encouraged men and children to pool family resources to help the women buy pressure cookers to improve the family food supply. Then families had helped with the purchase of sewing machines to be better dressed. Now women planned and organized more elaborate building project. Women usually depended on men for adobe brick-making, carpentry, and putting up walls, but they assumed responsibility for plastering, painting, and finishing houses, additions, and storage rooms.[18]

Women also began to take a new interest in the interiors of their houses. De Baca encouraged this first through the development of handicrafts which she hoped would supplement family incomes. Outlets for crafts had been established in Santa Fe for native crafts during the 1920s, and De Baca

encouraged women to supply articles directly to these stores. She noted that although women usually had good taste in selecting material and colors, when purchasing ready made items they often selected garishly colored items because they wanted to be up to date. De Baca told women to trust their own traditions, to produce products of hand-dyed and woven materials, and to continue to do their traditional colcha wool embroidery.[19]

The work of De Baca is a good example of what could be done with extension education when agents successfully crossed ethnic barriers. Her ethnicity allowed her to know how to work with Hispanic women as well as Anglo women. She worked to decrease ethnic and gender segregation. She encouraged women in their traditional farm work, labor exchanges, and handcrafts, at the same time that she introduced new technology. She began with what people wanted most and then introduced other programs as they saw their relevance to their survival and prosperity.

When the depression of 1932-1933 and the drought of 1933-1934 hit Santa Fe farm communities, the work of De Baca bore fruit. Although there were few federal programs in existence at the time, families were already expanding family gardens and knew how to can. When the federal government finally arrived with its program to purchase cattle, the families were able to butcher and can the healthiest animals. In 1935, over ninety percent of the farm families preserved enough food for the following year. They also canned large amounts of food cooperatively for families unable to do so. Through educational work, De Baca helped change attitudes and practices while

retaining much of the fabric of culture. She kept families on the farms for a decade, thus enabling families to remain on the farm through the severest drought and depression in New Mexico history. Once established, the pattern continued through World War II, with cash from soldiers going directly to the women who maintained the family farms. Ultimately, the war did cause disruption of rural communities. It brought heavy casualties of New Mexican men and few rural jobs for those men who returned. With the post war, New Mexico women entered a new phase of the struggle to remain on the land. That struggle has still not ended.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed study of the demographic changes between 1900 and 1940 see Joan Jensen, "New Mexico Farm Women, 1900-1940," in Robert Kern, ed., Labor in New Mexico: Strikes, Unions and Social History Since 1881 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), pp. 61-81.

2. Ibid., pp. 74-75.

3. These generalizations are drawn specifically from the annual reports of Fabiola Cabeza De Baca for 1930 to 1940 for Rio Arriba and Santa Fe counties. New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, State College, Agricultural Extension Service, annual Reports, New Mexico, National Archives, Microcopy, Reels 12-18, 20-22, 25 (NMCAAES, Annual Reports). Hispanic families in southern New Mexico probably differed in some respects but there are no similarly detailed reports for them.

4. For the early period see Joan M. Jensen, "Canning Comes to New Mexico: Women and Agricultural Extension, 1914-1919," New Mexico Historical Review 57 (Oct. 1982):351-386.

5. Ibid.

6. Information from NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reels 4-19, 21-22, 24.

7. Annual Report for 1924, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reel 6.

8. U.S., Manuscript Census for 1910. Based on a systematic

random sample of the farms in the county. For a more detailed account of the effect of the Elephant Butte Dam project on loss of land by Hispanics see Joan M. Jensen, "Farm Families Organize Their Work: New Mexico, 1900-1940," (Unpublished paper presented at the New Mexico Family and Community History conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico, July 14-16, 1983).

9. Meeting at home of a "Mexican who could not even speak English," and with blacks at Vado noted in Annual Report for 1927 and "Colored girls" mentioned in Annual Report for 1937, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reels 9 and 19. The only known Farm Bureau records are in the Freudenthal Family Papers, Box 10, Folders 2, 3, Rio Grande Historical Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

10. Annual report for 1922 and 1923, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reels 5 and 6.

11. Annual Report for 1940, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reel 24.

12. Annual Report for 1922, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reel 5.

13. Agricultural Agent's Annual Report for Doña Ana for 1935, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reel 17. See also Jensen, "New Mexico Farm Women, 1900-1940," p. 73.

14. Agricultural Agent's Annual Report for Rio Arriba for 1931, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reel 13.

15. For more details on De Baca see Joan M. Jensen, "'I've Worked, I'm Not Afraid of Work:' Farm Women in New Mexico, 1920-1940," in Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, New Mexico Women: Intercultural Perspectives (Albuquerque: University of New

Mexico Press, forthcoming).

16. Ibid., and Annual Reports for Santa Fe for 1930-1940 in NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reels 12-18, 20-22, 25.

17. Percentages given in Annual Reports for Santa Fe for 1936 and 1938, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reels 18, 21.

18. Annual Report for Santa Fe for 1938, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reel 21.

19. Annual Report for Rio Arriba and Santa Fe for 1932, NMCAAES, Annual Reports, NA T876, Reel 14.